



21st Century Community Learning Centers

Lessons From the Field: Serving All Students, Including Students With Disabilities



Topic Guide 7

Working With Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion

After reading this guide, you'll be able to...

- ✓ Build bridges between the 21st CCLC program and the school or district.
- ✓ Use staffing structures to connect the program with the school day.

Tools in this guide include ...

- ✓ An action planning checklist, with links to selected resources.

Schools and Districts: Valuable Partners

One of the most valuable resources school and program staff have is knowledge about the young people they serve. Instead of working in isolation and learning from trial and error what works best for each student, staff from both settings can share information, insights and strategies. For example, they can discuss positive behavior strategies that work, activities a student enjoys or dislikes, and effective communication systems such as tablet apps or sign language words. With permission from parents, schools can also share information from students' individualized education programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans (see topic guide 8 in this series). This information can help programs customize supports for student with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, speech or language impairment, specific learning disabilities or other disabilities. Partnerships between schools and 21st CCLC programs create a support network for program staff as they build an inclusive environment that nurtures the success of all students.

All 21st CCLC programs, whether school based or community based, can work with schools and districts to share important



YOU FOR YOUTH

All *Lessons From the Field* guides on inclusion, as well as other professional learning and technical assistance tools for 21st CCLCs, are available on the U.S. Department of Education's You for Youth (Y4Y) website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.

information and maximize existing resources to support inclusion.¹ Efforts to build bridges between programs and schools are most powerful when they span many layers of program personnel and support systems.² Collaboration can ease the transition for students from one environment to the other and can have a significant impact on student development and well-being.

Program leaders will need to think carefully, however, about differences between the environments of the school day and the 21st CCLC program. Working together, school and program leaders can create effective supports for individual students and propose systemic changes to policies and practices to benefit all students.

Building Bridges Between Programs and Schools or Districts

Communication

Imagine a school-based 21st CCLC program led by a school administrator, teacher or paraprofessional who values the program as an important way to help all students succeed in school and beyond. Such a program can take advantage of its built-in connection to the school. This is the case at Gardner Pilot Academy in Boston, where the program and the school share

Working With Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion

Bridges

- ★ Communication
- ★ Collaboration
- ★ Professional Learning Communities

Staffing Structures

- ★ Academic Liaison
- ★ Inclusion Facilitator
- ★ Surround Care

the same vision: All students, including those with disabilities, are valued members of the community who deserve opportunities to showcase their strengths and have positive experiences in the 21st CCLC environment. Joseph Sara, Gardner’s vice principal, sees afterschool as a unique space for student development in a broad sense. He says, “It’s not school day versus afterschool. There needs to be depth and continuity and connections. Afterschool gives kids a chance to explore learning as a three-dimensional process.”

Whether or not a program is school based, program leaders have found they must be intentional about communicating with school-day administrators and staff. The initial steps are, first, to create a shared

Story From the Field

Creating a Shared Vision of Inclusion in Afterschool

Joseph Sara, Vice Principal, Gardner Pilot Academy, Boston, Massachusetts

My background is in social work. I’ve been here for seven years, an administrator in the making. I’ve worked at a lot of different schools that had afterschool programs, but they were separated from the school day. Here, Lauren (Director of Extended Services) and I have had a genuine relationship since day one. Lauren has a vision that goes beyond providing academic instruction to providing services to the whole child. To facilitate the inclusion of all students, instruction is differentiated in both the school day and the 21st CCLC program, but some messages and strategies are consistent across both settings. For instance, we try to help children understand that poverty is a situation, not “who you are.” We provide experiences that might not otherwise be accessible to students, and students with disabilities are included. We believe that if we undermine students’ humanity, we lose their commitment to learning. That’s part of social justice. It’s understanding humanity and who you are as a human being.

understanding of the value 21st CCLC programs can bring to student growth and, second, to establish processes for working together to benefit all students. Sonia Johnson, state coordinator in Oklahoma, points out, “Sometimes the folks providing afterschool services may be teachers or aides, so they think that means the program is automatically aligned with the school day. But they don’t necessarily know the individual students who are in the afterschool program. They might not have access to IEPs or other information about particular students. They might not realize that a policy or procedure that’s required during the school day doesn’t apply to afterschool. So even if some staff work in both the school and the program, there can be a lack of communication and coordination between the school day and 21st CCLC program. This breakdown can affect what students experience when the hand-off from school to afterschool takes place.”

Collaboration

Strong relationships between school and district staff and 21st CCLC program staff are helpful but not sufficient for sustaining inclusive practices over time. Because of staff turnover and varying levels of staff knowledge and experience with inclusion, it is important to establish strong structures to support coordination and collaboration.

In 21st CCLC sites in California, some districts use a Coordination of Services Team (COST) model that engages afterschool program leaders in a comprehensive partnership with school administrators, special education staff, teachers, families, community partners and agency staff who meet regularly to discuss individual student needs. COST provides 21st CCLC leaders with information that can help them support students with special needs who are already in their programs. COST can also refer students with special needs into 21st CCLC programs to enhance their development and success. At Hayward Youth Enrichment Program and Girls Inc., COST teams consist of principals, assistant principals, counselors, psychologists, school nurses, mental health therapists, families, special education staff members and program leaders. Team members meet regularly to discuss students who have been referred and to create plans to support them; these plans sometimes include enrollment in the 21st CCLC program.

Professional Learning Communities

At Eagle View Elementary in Utah, professional learning communities include 21st CCLC staff along with school staff. This structure enables them to share knowledge and practices for supporting all students. Participants help identify strategies to support students with special

Story From the Field

The COST Model of Bridging Supports for All Students

Christopher Ibarra, Site Coordinator at Girls. Inc., San Leandro, California

The Coordination of Services Team (COST) is a committee of school and support staff. It consists of a COST coordinator, a principal or vice principal, afterschool program coordinators, a school counselor, and academic and parent liaisons. This team acts as the main arbiter on whether students require auxiliary support and what manner of support they need in order to have the best chance for academic and social-emotional success. Together, team members consider a student’s challenges, determine what supports the student needs, and comes up with a plan for getting the necessary resources. New students are discussed based on referrals from school-day personnel. The COST team talks about various experiences with the student and best practices for going forward. Team members who are best positioned to acquire the necessary resources are then assigned duties, and we set up a timeline for gaining access to those resources. This step sets up an accountability chain between the COST coordinator and individual members who are assisting with a particular student to help ensure that supports are provided expediently.

needs and ensure consistent understanding of those needs across school and program settings.

Using Staffing Structures to Connect Programs to the School Day

The staffing structures described below have been used by various 21st CCLC programs to connect to school-day staff, open the lines of communication and create meaningful opportunities for inclusion. The common element across these structures is the designation of program staff who are responsible for connecting with key school personnel to support all students, including those with disabilities.

Academic Liaison

Some program sites in California include an academic liaison position in their staffing structure. The academic liaison is a teacher or other professional who works in both the school and the 21st CCLC program and acts as a bridge between the two. This model may be especially beneficial for programs that are largely staffed by youth workers, college students or others who do not have



direct school-day connections. The academic liaison can discuss the 21st CCLC program during school staff meetings to help increase awareness and encourage communication, and can also share information across settings to ensure that all students are appropriately supported throughout their day.

Story From the Field

Professional Learning Communities

Robert Stearmer, Principal, Eagle View Elementary, and the Eagle View Special Education Team

Every six weeks, the district's elementary and special education teachers get together to learn from each other and to share ideas that have worked. This professional learning community includes teachers of students with moderate and severe disabilities.

Also, a professional learning community consisting of all of the school's kindergarten teachers meets weekly. If a kindergarten teacher has a question, issue or recommendation related to a student, the teacher first talks with the professional learning community. If its members don't agree on the best solution, the issue then goes to the Student Intervention Team (SIT).

A districtwide kindergarten professional learning community meets every two months to discuss teaching strategies, compare scores and write rubrics. On issues of inclusion, everyone works together as a team. If there is a question, the professional learning community consults with the special education teachers and/or the SIT team.

Inclusion Facilitator

Some sites in Massachusetts have inclusion facilitators, called SPED service coordinators in 21st CCLC in Lowell Public Schools. People in this role are responsible for communicating with classroom teachers and special educators, obtaining access to student IEPs, and working with program staff to develop strategies to ensure that programs are inclusive and accessible to students with various disabilities.

Surround Care

In school-based sites in Massachusetts, certified teachers and paraprofessionals work in 21st CCLC programs, and they ensure that information about students and the supports they need “travels” across settings. This knowledge helps staff create a comfortable transition for students as they move from the school day to the afterschool program. At Gardner Pilot Academy, “Surround Care” professionals — school-day paraprofessionals who are teacher leaders in the 21st CCLC program — focus on providing seamless transitions and targeted supports to students. Staff turnover has been low. The keys to retaining staff are Gardner’s commitment to professionalizing the Surround Care positions and the community’s commitment to a 21st CCLC program model that is

Think About It

Five Simple Ways to Connect and Collaborate With Schools

Which of these ideas have you tried? Which ones would you like to try?

- ★ Attend school staff meetings.
- ★ Invite school staff to visit your program.
- ★ Plan a project or activity related to themes or topics addressed in school.
- ★ Participate in an IEP meeting for a student who attends your program.
- ★ Showcase what students have learned and achieved in your program.

For more ideas, see the “Communication and Collaboration Checklist,” available on the You for Youth website (<https://y4y.ed.gov>) under “Aligning With the School Day” in the “Tools” section.

associated with quality programming. Gardner holds the Surround Care professionals in the same high regard as the daytime teachers, posting the names of both staff members outside each classroom door.

Story From the Field

Professionalizing Surround Care

Lauren Fogarty, Director of Extended Services, Gardner Pilot Academy, Boston

Surround Care was implemented in 2007 as part of our pilot school proposal on how to creatively use funds. We worked collaboratively with the YMCA of Greater Boston to create a position to support quality afterschool programming. We’ve stayed consistent with the purpose of the model; this year, Surround Care Professionals are 100 percent funded by Boston Public Schools (BPS). Next year, they will be funded 50 percent by BPS and 50 percent by the YMCA, but with full BPS benefits. Our afterschool program costs about \$275,000. If it didn’t work well, it would be easy to cut, but people have fought for it. The community wanted to maintain the integrity of the afterschool model, which speaks to the quality of the program. Everyone wants Surround Care! Almost all Surround Care paraprofessionals have bachelor’s degrees and the fifth-grade paraprofessional is an applied behavior analysis therapist. Some are Gardner alumni. The K-2 paraprofessional is the assistant program director. Not one staff member is new to the program over the past three years (though some are new to their current positions).

Working With Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion

Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (With Selected Resources)

- **See You for Youth’s “Aligning With the School Day” course** for online training and customizable tools (including the “Communication and Collaboration Checklist”) for improving alignment between 21st CCLC programs and schools. The course is available at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.
- **Encourage subgrantees to identify key contacts at feeder schools.** Provide time for frequent visits to the school to establish and maintain positive relationships and for “teacher shadowing” so that program staff can observe school-day strategies or modifications in action.
- **Collaborate with other student support systems to address individual needs** and to make inclusive practices consistent across settings. Consider establishing relationships with people in the following roles:
 - School-day teachers, specialists and support staff.
 - Occupational, physical and speech therapists that students see outside of school.
 - Other out-of-school time programs the youth attends (or attended).
- **Examine staffing structures** to identify possible ways to professionalize afterschool positions by adding responsibilities, hours, benefits or pay.



YOU FOR YOUTH

Interested in checklists on other inclusion topics? All *Lessons From the Field* topical guides on inclusion contain checklists like this one. The guides are available at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.

Notes

¹ M. Bevel and G. Altrogge, “Preparing Future Administrators and Teachers: Developing Empathy for Individuals With Disabilities,” *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* 60 (2010): 52-56.

² T. Alquraini and D. Gut, “Critical Components of Successful Inclusion of Students With Severe Disabilities: Literature Review,” *International Journal of Special Education*, 27, no. 1 (2012): 42-59.

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